

Interview with Penelope (Penne) Laingen

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Foreign Service Spouse Series

PENELOPE (PENNE) LAINGEN

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi and Joan Williamson

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LAINGEN: (beginning mid-sentence) that he probably did her a favor by sending her on somewhere else. Macomber just wheeled on me and said, "I disagree! We're going to teach these countries our way of life. We want our women to have the equality and-" It really just floored me, because it was the total opposite to what I'd been led to believe or trained in going overseas, that we were guests in these countries, that we should not show American arrogance. My opinion, you see, was not on the ascendancy, it was descending in our society, and he was simply not going to let the momentum die out.

Q (Fenzi): He was also non-career.

LAINGEN: The other thing was, when Carol Pardon was talking I agreed with most of what she said. This is the interesting thing that later I'll tell you about — a letter where people misunderstood what I was saying. At any rate, she was against the hierarchy of spouses and the anachronisms of protocol, dropping cards and so forth, and the way women were second-class citizens, appendages to their husbands and all that. She wanted to wipe the whole slate clean. I remember saying at that point, "I agree with you up to a point but there are women who have devoted their whole lives to the Foreign Service, who take this partnership seriously. And you destroy that *raison d'etre*, you're going to (laughing) have

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more problems than you can imagine. And again Macomber said, "Too late. You're out of step."

So I thought to myself, I don't know why I came [to the meeting], because they've got it all in their heads how it's to be, how it's going to be. I really didn't care, at that point, because we were posted at home and I could be free of all the disagreeableness, (laughter) until 1977, when my husband was appointed Ambassador to Malta. I remember at my husband's swearing in someone came up to me and said, "I wonder what kind of an ambassador's wife you're going to make." I recall saying, "Look, I'm not an 'ambassador's wife', I happen to be married to the ambassador." I'd picked up the line that everybody was speling, and trying to go along with the Directive and understand it. I hope you've interviewed Sallie Lewi (Fenzi says "yes") because she could tell you of Marlen (Neumann's) reaction and her reaction to the Directive when it came out at post in Afghanistan.

Q (Williamson): They just went right on doing what they were doing.

LAINGEN: Oh, they did? See, I missed all that.

Q (Fenzi): What was the outcome of that first meeting? Because that was the very first meeting when they got everybody together.

LAINGEN: I'm not even sure of that, I'd have to look back in the files. But it was Gladys Rogers, whoever she was —

Q (Fenzi): She must have been a member of WAO.

LAINGEN: I sort of thought she was a Department, maybe Macomber's deputy.

Q (Fenzi): Oh, that could be. We'll look her up.

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LAINGEN: We'll have to look her up. She was in charge of that meeting. Whether it was the first I don't know, but it was certainly the Women's Action Organization that had called it together.

Q (Fenzi): But had anything been published about —

LAINGEN: Nothing at all. I know that.

Q (Fenzi): But see, the first published thing was June 1971, and that was the Guidelines which were drafted under Dorothy Stansbury. But this was before that?

LAINGEN: Yes. Because the Guidelines — I have all this, I'm going to give you a photocopy that talks about the Guidelines. Then there were numerous reactions to the Guidelines that were in. Here's from Ambassadors, John Kenneth Galbraith's reactions, and so forth. I also have Carol Pardon's article for you. You know, at the time she seemed very revolutionary to those of us who had been immersed in this traditional system. I can look at it now and think, "Gee, why didn't we see that?" How clear headed she was. But I really didn't have much quarrel with her, I just thought it was sort of revolutionary and it probably would never work.

Q (Fenzi): Do you have Eleanore Lee writing as "Mary Stuart" in that same issue, saying that the Guidelines would never work, because it didn't matter what kind of guidelines you set forth for the wife, it depended on what the Ambassador and his spouse would like. We do have a copy of that, too.

LAINGEN: That is really the point that hit me square in the face when I got to Malta. I had no choice as an ambassador's wife.

Q (Fenzi): Let's go back a moment. What happened after that first meeting?

LAINGEN: I heard nothing.

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Q (Fenzi): Oh, you did nothing more.

LAINGEN: No. I think I was just a total failure, you see, because I was representing the wrong “mode”, the wrong side.(laughter)

Q (Fenzi): You didn't go to any of the open forums?

LAINGEN: No. I never knew about them. It's really strange. I had a young baby. I probably wasn't too keyed in. I remember hearing about it after the fact. I wished that I had. Yes, this WAO group suggested that this forum take place. That I know was a step. Then, here is this international dialogue among Foreign Service women, so they had that; also, they brought in some of the foreign embassies to see what they thought. At any rate, I know that later on I heard how the Directive came about and I have a memo on that if you want me to insert that now.

That was when we were working on the 1985 Spouse Report. Kathleen Boswell and I, who were co-chairmen, went to see Mr. Robert S. Steven, a former staffer for William B. Macomber. We had lunch at the Foreign Service Club and he told us various things concerning how the Directive came about. [reading] “The decision to go ahead with the Directive was taken when William B. Macomber was Deputy Under Secretary for Management.” Steven was a member of Macomber's staff and designated as the liaison between the Women's Action Organization and M [Management]. “Mr. Steven said that M decided to look into the spouse question because of an ever increasing number of spouse related grievances and because WAO was becoming militant on women's issues. Pressure from the two sources motivated M to put together several panels ...” see, the one that I attended was one of those panels, “some composed of Department of State principals and some composed of representative spouses to consider the problem. M also asked WAO to present its proposals for reform concerning Foreign Service spouses to the Open Forum.” So that's how that came about.

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"M initially saw no reason to change the policy on spouses." Now, that was interesting to us because, you see, here it is 1985 and we are seeing all the problems that stem from that Directive — not the Directive per se, but from outcroppings of what happened after that. Interestingly enough, we see that some people in M were kind of worried and felt exactly as I did, that you destroy the system totally, you're going to have women out there whose *raison d'être* destroyed, too.

Q (Fenzi): You're making this comment as of 1971 or 1985?

LAINGEN: This is 1983, actually. And that Mr. Steven says that even before they formulated the Directive they knew they were going to have problems, but they went ahead with it anyway.

Q (Fenzi): Well, Hop[Meyers] had a comment on that. She said that the Department just assumed that there would be enough senior spouses to pick up the pieces and carry on as they had in the past. And that's absolutely what happened.

LAINGEN: And if you look at the Directive, it does say "Oh, we'd be so happy if you do go on" and "we have no objections to wives who choose to go on and do this." But what the psychological aspect of that was saying "we don't care whether you do it, it would be nice if you do it, but you're really not necessary." And that was a lethal thing to do. I mean, for some women. Now, for the younger ones who didn't have these representational responsibilities, WHOOPEE! The doors were open, "I don't have to drop cards any more." And for some of us — I had more horror stories than anybody about that system, in fear and trembling as a young spouse, so I was happy to be rid of it.

But when I got to Malta, I suddenly realized, as an ambassador's wife, that the freedom was not for me. It was declared hypocritically, really, because what the Department did was destroy the partnership when it was still there, as you said. As long as the hierarchy of officers exists, the wife spouse cannot be easily divorced from it, and you've got problems

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within the family. Janet Lloyd told m(laughing) that FLO had become “a walking divorce court” at the time when she first took over. At any rate, to get back to this — I'm sorry to keep bouncing back and forth — but here is Robert Steven telling us that they really were concerned at that time. What tipped the balance in the decision, though, was the opinion of the Department of State's lawyer who, upon reviewing the traditional status of spouses, “found existing policy to be legally indefensible because the spouse was not an employee.” So here you've got the Department of State trying to avoid litigation. (Pro bono attorney for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History said that a spouse could not litigate, but that the FSO could file suit on her behalf.) And that is the main reason that Directive was written. (No references to this have been found in researching pre Directive documents.) It was to get the Department of State off the legal hook.

Q (Fenzi): Do you mean to tell me that a spouse was going to sue the Department because they were making demands upon her-

LAINGEN: Illegal demands.

Q (Fenzi): I didn't think you could sue the United States Government.

LAINGEN: Oh, yes, you can sue the State Department, certainly.

Q (Williamson): You can sue the Secretary of State. That's where that Alison Palmer —

Q (Fenzi): Maybe you can sue an individual but I don't think you can sue the Government.

Q (Williamson): I think you may be right, Jewell. Because the discrimination suit that was brought, as far as the women and Alison Palmer et al., was brought against the Secretary of State — as, I assume, the representative of the Department.

LAINGEN: I suppose a spouse could sue an ambassador. Right?

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Q (Fenzi): It would be interesting to find out who those lawyers were who felt that this was a problem, and whether there was actually a case about which they were concerned.

LAINGEN: Well, these were State Department lawyers, so it could easily be found — who was Legal Adviser at that time.

Q (Fenzi): This would be early '7[confirmed by the others].

LAINGEN: The Department of State had to clarify its legal position to avoid litigation, so I think you can sue the State Department. According to Mr. Steven, it was not a welcome decision because M fully realized the positive contribution of the spouse to the Foreign Service and did not diminish the traditional relationship. Mr. Steven was asked to re-word the WAO proposals, which I thought was interesting because they were written in what was considered “strident language” (the three all laugh) “and to incorporate those proposals with a legally defensible status for the Foreign Service spouse. That status was ‘no status’, in what became the 1972 policy on wives of Foreign Service employees.”

Now, that statement is Mr. Steven. That “status”, he says, was really “no status”. “Mr. Steven has not been directly involved in the spouse issue since he left M but he continues to follow it out of personal interest.” (laughter again) “More recently Mr. Steven as an inspector was disturbed by what he saw as a trend towards further distancing of the Department of State and spouses. He felt that Department initiatives like the establishment of FLO and separate maintenance allowance increased the distance initiated by the 1972 decision, but he suggested that the Foreign Service is changing too. As an inspector for the Management audit of the recruitment, examination and employment function of the Department of State, he became aware of a growing gap between the traditional Foreign Service and the type of officer now coming into the Foreign Service. He said that what may be seen as a lack of commitment by the spouse might be only a reflection of the lack of commitment by the officer.” I thought that was interesting!

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“He said that his audit had not included a recommendation to the Director General to commission a demographic study of the Personnel system. He knew that the Director General had recently contracted with a consulting firm to undertake this study, and he suggested that we approach the Director General on the possibility of including the Forum Committee's Role of the Spouse questionnaire in the consultant's forthcoming questionnaire.” Which we didn't: we went off and got our own money.

At any rate, I felt, reading this morning's paper about these soldiers and women soldiers, in Saudi Arabia, and someone has written a Letter to the Editor [presumably of The Washington Post] saying that these women are no different than men soldiers, they should be treated the same and so forth — total misunderstanding of the idea that we are guests in these countries. We cannot, as Americans, go in, which we do so often, and just ram our culture down everyone's throat. So, to this day I would love to talk to Macomber about it. Maybe he's mellowed by now.(all laugh)

At any rate, that was that meeting. And as I say, when it came down to being an ambassador's wife, the Directive was totally incomprehensible to me. I was working very, very hard. I had no choice in the matter. It was in a very small, 100% Catholic country, family oriented, traditional, It had been under British rule in the days of the Raj ,and they expected all the women to troop out in their formal dresses. It was still that way, and sometimes when I didn't go to a function, I would run into a Maltese who would say, “Where were you? Were you sick?” I mean, it was impossible. It had just had to be undertaken. Otherwise, I could have left pos(laughter). I really was a painter and a writer, and I longed to do these things, but I simply didn't have the time.

It was sort of ironic because I helped a young staff officer's wife. I introduced her to a friend who was an opera star, and Carol picked up on her career. I sat there and watched her on stage, you know, yet was unable to do the things that I wanted to do. So in 1978, here comes from Janet Lloyd's office, the new FLO office, a letter suggesting that they are going to review the Directive. Now, this came out of the 1977 Forum report which made

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various recommendations. One was to establish the Family Liaison Office, and among other things was to “Let's get this Directive straight for those spouses who are not free.” Do you know, of that 1977 report, it's interesting: this is the one issue that has never been solved. They did everything else that those folks recommended, except that.

Q (Fenzi): When Janet sent that letter, who was recommending that the Directive be reviewed? FLO?

LAINGEN: Well, you see, that's what I'm saying: From the 1977 Forum report, she's trying to — not only did she (Janet Lloyd) come into position because of that report, but she was taking all these recommendations step by step. So, one was to review the Directive. Here: “Department to review the '72 directive on Spouses.” And, she said, she sent it to all posts, and she said, “if you don't vote don't crab.” So immediately I called all the gals in the Embassy together and we sat down — I didn't have a traditional “wives group” or anything like that, but everyone was interested and happy to come and talk about it. And every single one of those gals sat down and wrote a paper on all her feelings about this Directive and many other side issues.

I remember one older wife was very worried about retirement and the pensions and so forth. The only wife, however, who was really angry about the system and wanted to be free of it had five children, and she and her husband were fighting like cats and dogs, have since divorced, over the issue. He was a real martinet. He would come and ask, “Have you written your thank you note to Mrs. De Medici,” (or something) and she'd say, “That's not my job, that's your job.” With that kind of thing going on, that marriage did split. At any rate we all wrote a paper. My idea was that while we welcomed the changes in the strict, rigid protocol, et cetera, and that I didn't particularly care about being “an ambassador's wife,” i.e., I wasn't bothered at not being able to direct junior wives, but I felt there was merit to a system where you could go to any post and fit in immediately, you were welcomed, there was an apparatus. And nothing had been substituted for that apparatus.

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Maybe FLO would be that eventually, and I suppose it has been, for CLOs. But at that point, when I arrived at this small post I was astounded to find that certain wives didn't know one another, that my predecessor had made no effort to draw the spouses together. It just seemed incredible to me. Now, I could have let that go, I could have done the same thing, I expect. But I can tell you, we had a very happy association, and I believe there was merit to trying to continue to foster that kind of community spirit. And I felt it did fall, kind of, to the ambassador's wife to do that. She may not be a natural leader, but I felt there was deference in that direction, that people did look to you whether you took that role or not.

That was the gist of my paper. And I felt that while I didn't want the total Directive rewritten, I felt that something should be added to encourage those of us who were not as free as this policy says. At any rate I was astounded to find that the reaction was totally negative against any revision. But as it turned out, they got 63 responses, 36 of which opposed revising the Directive. I was just appalled. I thought, "36 people are responsible for saying how it will stay." There was something wrong with that.

Q (Fenzi): Well, there must have been an even smaller minority who got the Directive put in place in the first place.

LAINGEN: Right! (she laughs) And mostly men. (she laughs) I think David Newsom doesn't dare look me in the eye these days.

Q (Fenzi): I don't know him, nor Martin Hillenbrand either, but he was a high ranking Department official who was responsible also. (Newsom and Hillenbrand as chiefs of African and European bureaus respectively, signed the Directive to show cohesiveness in the Department, no matter how diversified the bureau.)

Q (Williamson): So, there were 36 responses for, and 27 against. It's only 60% that supported no revisions.

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Q (Fenzi): *It was not unanimous by any means.*

Q (Williamson): *Not unanimous, but very few responded at all.*

LAINGEN: Right. But the thing that has always been the problem — I found this true in doing the 1985 report — is that we do everything by majority. And it really shouldn't work that way, because we're not talking about a monolithic group of women, or spouse (murmurs of agreement). So in our spouse report we had to look at the various groups that we're talking about, and by breaking it down that way, the minority definitely in numbers is the group of senior Foreign Service spouses (today, I have to say "spouses of senior officers"), we found they had the lowest morale in the Foreign Service. Yet they were doing two-thirds of the number of hours of representational work and they did not feel they were free. So you could say "the majority, they aren't put upon." But, see, that doesn't tell you anything. That's not fair to the minority. Because the majority doesn't have the representational expectations that are on the minority's shoulders. So that was the way I felt about this decision taking the majority word that everything was just hunky-dory the way it was. To me that was wrong.

Q (Williamson): *So what happened then, Penne. To go back a bit, in '78, then, after they got this 36-24 vote or whatever it was, what happened then?*

LAINGEN: That was IT.

Q (Williamson): *They just decided — Janet Lloyd dropped it then at that point?*

LAINGEN: Just dropped it. I was so appalled by that that I wrote a letter, which appeared in the October 1978 issue — now that I look back I smile, because it was rather naive. Anyway, I have a letter here from Janet Lloyd, who says: "I very much enjoyed talking to you and the Newsletter was so impressed with your letter that they plan on publishing it next month." So, they did, and here it is: "An Ambassador's Wife Enters the Debate." Generally I was saying that while the Directive meant well, some of us were not as free

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as it implied. That has always been my basis for feeling, because at that point in time the Department was telling me I was free to do anything I wanted, and that was just not correct. And at the same time, there was no way of their telling me “thank you,” either. So you begin to think, “Gee, I put all my eggs in this basket, this partnership which meant so much to me for 30 years, and then suddenly it means nothing to anybody. Therefore, what am I?” In those days, we didn't talk about “self esteem,” we didn't talk about ourselves that much, did we? We did the work, and talked about our husbands, I guess.

Q (Fenzi): That's quite true, you know. Often, I'll ask people, “Do you have a resume, or something about your career?” And they'll invariably give you some writeup on what their husbands have done; those in our generation.

LAINGEN: It's sad. But there's much to be said for the women's lib movement, I'm not saying there isn't. However, I feel that the juncture of the Directive was the point where, instead of throwing out the partnership, they should have made it more important and said to the others, “You're free, you're all free to do what you want to do, but if you choose to do this, this is what we will do for you.” At that point, they should have paid us, or they should have done something to keep that partnership strong and keep it a viable role. But perhaps they couldn't have - with the feeling of individualism, and independence, and liberation that was so prevalent then.

Q (Williamson): And always fighting a budget. They've never been very clever at getting money out of Congress for anything, let alone— I mean, the essentials they barely get the money for. To get it for something beyond that is usually turned down, because they don't know how to fight for it.

LAINGEN: But, you see, the thing that was so wrong was that a social movement in this country, which was trying to get women to strike out on their own (there were a number of divorces, women had to fall back on something if their husbands left them, and so forth) it was a movement which really didn't fit into the Foreign Service life style very well. As we

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say in the 1985 Spouse Report, it was like fitting a round peg into a square hole. Now, it was bound to move toward a Service of single careerists —

Q (Williamson): Which it has.

LAINGEN: Did you find the Foreign Service Journal article (summer, 1990)? (They reply, “Yes.”) Now, the singles are unhappy, “hanh -hanh- hanhhh!” [like whines]

Q (Williamson): Well, they're bound to be.

Q (Fenzi): The thing that struck me about the singles article was that there was no suggestion that anyone make a sacrifice in the line of duty, no concept of service in the Foreign Service, it was all the introspective “me” solution to things. Of course, it was written by a woman who was not a Foreign Service officer. She's a Washington free lance writer .

At the end of my 1978 letter, (in State Magazine) I said, “Hand in hand with the women's liberation movement has come a most unfortunate trend in attitudes towards traditional wives. The Foreign Service, it seems, is no different in that respect. To read that the best preparation for being the wife of a diplomat is an '8th grade education and a love of the kitchen' makes me very sad, and angry, too. This attitude lies between the lines of the 1972 Directive because it implies that a wife is an unnecessary appendage to her husband. We seem also to have lost all our ideals that helped to make our country great — volunteerism, patriotism, pioneering, selflessness, neighborliness, public service. It's no wonder that we've reached the point where we have to be paid for everything that we do.” Well, what happened after that: I got a number of personal letters, saying “right on, a great letter, etc. etc.” but no one publicly supported me.

Q (Williamson): Did you get any public disagreement?

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LAINGEN: Oh, yes, yes, I did. And the next issue of State magazine carried a letter from Carolyn Barrett, who I learned later was a young AID wife. Among other things she said that “females have been traditionally socialized toward such sadomasochistic roleplaying in most societies. It blocks authentic behavior and helps anesthetize the individual to the pain their position would otherwise cause them.” She called me a sadomasochist for continuing to work without pay. And she says, “Women who have been born, reared and lived in an environment that allows them the authentic self-expressions do not fit comfortably in the traditional role of the diplomat's wife.” She said what I really was upset about was “the loss of my traditional right to victimize junior spouses.”

Another letter came from Harrison B. Sherwood. The essence of his letter was that there is no way the traditional wife can get back her self esteem unless she is paid, because she has been legally removed from the system. Then there was a letter from Elinor Constable, who says she'd been a longtime friend of Penne Laingen and hoped that she didn't upset me if she disagreed with me. Her general thesis was that the Directive should not be changed, because what it really did was excuse women from “a narrow, institutionalized responsibility and freed them to a broader responsibility.” What? To themselves?

You see, that is the fallacy of the idea that you're free of all responsibility, by being your own person you have a broader outlook. I think, what greater responsibility can there be but to your country, to your family, to your husband, to your children? I don't understand it, myself. And I don't to this day. However, she was one who had been an officer, came back into the Service, and she has been an ambassador. We're still friends. But I can't understand it — when her husband was back here, she was always overseas or something. They've lived apart for a number of years. So that was the system that was being created. But the thing that upset me about Elinor's letter was that, again, she misunderstood in a way what I was saying. I didn't care about the hierarchy, I didn't care about victimizing junior spouses - I simply was saying, “Hey, I mean, if I'm free, free me!” Let me be as free as any other spouse. And I still feel thi— in my interview that I did with

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you, Jewell, I said to this day an ambassador's wife is not allowed to work, she can't be a CLO. So she's not "free." She still is not free of these responsibilities unless she leaves the post.

Q (Williamson): Well, she's still going to have the responsibilities anyway — there's no way she can get out of them unless she plans to hide out in the back scullery corner.

LAINGEN: Well, then people did come to my rescue. Including my husband, who said, "I've known Penne Laingen a long time and I don't find her sadomasochistic." (hearty laughs)

Q (Fenzi): Well, fortunately for that, Penne!

LAINGEN: "And I find such allegations unfair, unfounded and unnecessary."

Q (Williamson): But how extraordinary that this whole debate evolved this way, you know?

LAINGEN: It just turned ugly, it really did. I had a lovely letter from Anne MacFarland. She was an officer and she married one. She said she totally agreed with me and said, "I can see both sides." And then the loveliest thing was to have the Embassy wives come to my rescue. One letter: "Observing Mrs. Laingen, one can only wonder at the official policy which states that the Foreign Service wife is free to follow her own interests." So I think that's very nice.

Then I returned to the US in 1979. I was really looking forward to being home. Bruce was going into the Inspection Corps, he didn't really have another post, so as an Inspector he was to set off for South America. He went to Minnesota to visit his family. Meanwhile I'd been in Malta packing up, so we were apart from his departure in January until March when I got home. He went to Minnesota, then back to Malta for the CFCE conference. What I'm getting at is that we were really apart for all of 1979, because in May when he was in Minnesota the Department called and asked would he go to Tehran — just for 4-6

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weeks to fill in for Charlie Naas, who was the charg# d'affaires, as I believe was stated in my earlier interview.

I was very happy to be home, able to set up my household, get up every morning having my own routine, and reall(she laughs) take the Directive seriously! Then, as you know, BANG, Bruce was taken hostage. You could say, "Well, you're free to do your own thing. You're your own person." I could have gone about and said what I really thought about the President or the policies on Iran. But you are, as I've said so many times to young wives, you really are in the Foreign Service. I don't care how you slice it, as long as you're married to this individual you really have to consider the Foreign Service. Had I misbehaved during the hostage crisis, I think they (the Department officials) would have called me in and said, "Huh uh, this is a no-no, you can't behave this way." (They did reprimand another wife for criticizing the Department publicly.)

But also as a result of the Directive, I got no support from the Department as Bruce's wife. You see what I'm saying. They would call me in, yes, as an individual, "How are you feeling" and so forth, but when the Bishop is calling me, from the Cathedral, deferring to me as the wife of the chief of mission in Tehran, there are expectations that you have a role there. And I did not get any support in that role from the Department of State. Probably it doesn't matter; it's insignificant. But it just points up the hypocrisy of the whole policy.

Now, yesterday, when I see Mrs. Nathaniel Howell at the airport greeting the families coming home from Kuwait and Iraq, and seeing she has the support, she has the Department saying "you should be there," that's what I did not have throughout that whole hideous 1979-81 crisis; which I think is wrong. Not only that, but afterwards never once did any official say "thank you for the way you did behave." Not once.

Q (Fenzi): No letters or anything?

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LAINGEN: Nothing, absolutely nothing. And during the crisis, not one official saying, “Can I take your son to a basketball game?” Or “How's your car?” or “How's your house?” “Your finances?” Nothing. The families who were coming in from the outside — they had a quota of two people to bring: a mother and father, or a wife and a child, and would have their way paid to Washington to attend these meetings or to go to the Cathedral services or whatnot. So I said, “Is it possible for my son, in college in Minnesota, who is up there facing the media alone (and so forth) to have his way home paid to come to the meeting with me?” “No,” they said, “we're not going to start a precedent.” It was bad, very bad. And I hope to goodness that the Department has learned something from that.

Q (Fenzi and Williamson): We shall see.

Q (Fenzi): And so that experience led you to become involved in the spouse committee of the Forum to do the report?

LAINGEN: Right. (some discussion as to year of the report) The committee meeting began in '83. Now... let's see how that came about. (she shows them a picture) I participated in the Georgetown Symposium —

Q (Fenzi): We have that. This was 1981.

LAINGEN: My point in the Georgetown symposium essay was precisely that it really was a moot point, because my husband was still a hostage when I wrote that, and whether I was suggesting that the only solution I could see was to ask a spouse if she wants to be a partner or an individual, if she says “partner” then pay her to do the work.

So then I was called in to be on this committee of AAFSW part of the Forum, called the Spouse Committee. We met first at the home of Katie Miller, I believe, and I have written you some notes about what we discussed. There again, the issue of the Directive was raised once more — that it had not been solved by the 1977 Forum paper (nor by FLO). Mostly at that meeting everyone was relating what they had found at post, what was

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going on and the unhappiness, the lack of coordination and community spirit, and so on. I remember saying, "I think we need to put out a questionnaire, because there's no way you can write a report and really know what people are thinking unless you ask them. Because, there again, you may just be taking the opinion of one small group."

Then we finally realized that we needed professional help in putting this questionnaire together. Kathleen Boswell knew of a man, Mr. Hursh-Cesar, who was a professional, who said he would help us formulate the questions. We needed money, so then we went to the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, which gave us a grant that meant we could have the questionnaire computerized and done professionally. They would also pay for printing the Report.

Q (Fenzi): As I've told you many times, I think the Report is splendid. But, what was the purpose of the Report? What was AAFSW trying to do with the Report? Just show how various Foreign Service wives felt?

LAINGEN: No. I tell you, the reason for the confusion —

Q (Fenzi): (laughing) I didn't even know there was any confusion.

LAINGEN: Yes, there was. It began with— Sue Parsons was president of AAFSW, Sue Low was Forum chairman, Kathleen Boswell and I were co-chairmen of the Spouse Committee. Eventually our group boiled down to these four people meeting, and we met through the whole process of the questionnaire and mailing and so forth. Then Sue Parsons became FLO director, and went out. Kathleen dropped out because of problems she had with Sue Low, as did the pollster, Mr. Hursh-Cesar. That left me and Sue Low.

I had gathered a committee together to write this report. We were going to write up the results of the questionnaire and then make recommendations. Meanwhile, Sue Low had her idea for Foreign Service Associates, and the presidency of AAFSW had changed hands, now in Molly Beyer's hands. Molly had really come in cold, was unsure of all the

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background. I told Sue Low I felt that our committee should write this report, and one of our recommendations can be “whatever your idea is, of Foreign Service Associates.” Sue did not want to do that, saying she couldn't write in a vacuum, and resigned as Forum chairman. I had thought the committee would write the Report and submit it to Sue Low as Forum chairman to revise, etc.

Q (Fenzi): What vacuum was she writing in? You were giving her a platform.

Q (Williamson): That's right. She wanted it to be a separate entity, in other words?

LAINGEN: She wanted to do it all.

Q (Fenzi): It would have been much more valid to come out with a proposal based on the findings of this board.

LAINGEN: But it didn't. Her husband was over at FSI as Director and he was able to help her. Do you have a copy of her report?

Q (Fenzi): I don't have her report but I have an article —

LAINGEN: I'll get it for you, then you'll have the whole thing that he helped her print. Plus Betty and Al Atherton helped her. He was Director General then. At any rate, she had her political people lined up, and here I was with my little committee, and no backing as usual. That's my problem. (laughter) So we slugged it out. We had a deadline to get this thing printed.

Q (Williamson): So you were writing a paper that was a summation —

LAINGEN: We divided up, into Education, and Community, and Children, and so forth. Everybody wrote a section. Roz Mack did the one on Employment, (and Sue Low was going to help her on that but backed out of that. too). I had worked with the two Sues and Jean German on the Crisis report. That had been very, very difficult, because we all had

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ideas, but it had to be written a certain way, hammering out details such as commas, etc. as a group, and it's just very difficult to work that way. So I said to each person on my committee, "you and you and you write this and this and this, and then I will polish it all and put it together." That's what we did, and it worked very well. We had no problems whatsoever.

We got to the AAFSW board meeting for review of the Report, however, and Sue Low had brought Betty Atherton and all these folks and they didn't like it because it was "negative", they said. We had put in comments about FLO, for instance, that were negative responses from spouses. I said, "Well, what in the world was the purpose of this anyway if you're not going to take the negative comments from spouses overseas? What point is it?" Well, they wanted it to, kind of, be more balanced, you know. So as a result Molly Beyer was really in a bind between these two forces, and she said, "All right, we'll redo it, we'll go over it again." I thought I was going to faint, having spent 2-1/2 years on this thing. If it hadn't been for Carol Sutherland who came forward and said, "I'll help you," it would not have been finished. (I had had Lesle Dorman and Elspeth Rostow and numerous people on my committee who had computerized the Report, we had gone over it with a fine-toothed comb, proofread it, and so forth) Yet, to Sue Low and Betty Atherton, it still wasn't the way they wanted it. And Sue was no longer Forum chairman, and Betty was wife of the Director General, both with powerful husbands to back them up!

So Carol and I did it, and we took, I would say, about three months. But in the meantime the presses had stopped and I was very concerned that the State Department would say, "Can't do it now for you, it's too late." It was very touch-and-go, but they did finally print it and sent it overseas everywhere. In the meantime, the head of AAFSW changed again, to Pam Moffat. That was unfortunate because she knew nothing of the background. Meanwhile Sue Low's Foreign Service Associates had taken on a whole new ascendancy, and when our Report came along I'm sure it was just overloading the circuits of the Department of State. (laughter)

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I was so desperate, in the end I threw in a little portion saying we believed the Department should consider something like Foreign Service Associates. You see, I felt we had been overshadowed by the FSA proposal. I don't know the Foreign Service Associates proposal thoroughly but I did attend the big sort of seminar where they discussed, where we broke into various groups - - Career, etc. etc. One of the groups was the wives who must do representation, and compensation issues sort of thing. That is the one aspect, again, which even Sue Low has backed away from because she felt it would destroy the whole rest of her proposal. She wrote an article for Parade Magazine (Fenzi says she has a copy of it) and you will see in it that that is the one issue they're backpedaling now, they're trying to say "we don't really think spouses should be paid for that kind of work."

It's just beyond me how it will ever be solved, really, at this point. Unless ambassadors' wives are just given their freedom to do their own thing. That's the only solution I see now. Because they'll never be paid, I don't believe, because they don't ever want to be back in their husbands' efficiency reports. So the whole spirit that we once knew of partnership and togetherness and the same goals, I don't see it any more.

Q (Williamson): I don't see it either, Penne. But I do see that they are going to, willy nilly, have to address the issue. Because now that we are at 50% of the Service being single, those jobs of representation, whether it's CODELS, whatever, [with heavy emphasis] still has to be done. Somebody, (laughing) I hate to sound like the cartoon, but somebody's gotta do it.

LAINGEN: Well, my point is that I feel the wife definitely should NOT do it. Betty Atherton's going to Egypt and having an office in the embassy, and she's still not paid, and she's trying to prove her point. It didn't work. She worked her tail off. But the only answer to making the Department see that it is a viable position or role that should be compensated is for the wives not to do it. (laughing)

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Q (Williamson): *I take your point. All I was saying is that I think they're going to have to address it because more and more I found at my last post that I didn't have, essentially, any wives on the post! So they are going to have to address the issue because the issue is there, now, whether they like it or not.*

LAINGEN: Well, I almost wished that Bruce had been appointed to another post, so I could drop out. I was that ugly, that upset by the whole situation.

Q (Fenzi): *I think women have done that.*

Q (Williamson): *Well, I think it also depends upon whatever relationship you have with your husband and his approach. I can remember even back about when the Directive came out or even before, because she'd been doing this before, but I can remember when in Zambia, Ambassador Troxel's wife, had no intention of doing anything about it; as a matter of fact, she was off in Luwanda taking photographs with a crew that was doing a documentary. We were only visitors, when four of us — Troxel, Wen Coote, Larry and myself — drove in a car over the Great North Road, 1,000 miles or whatever, from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka. It was a never to be forgotten ride, considered at that point to be Hell's Run. We got back to find that Holly, the ambassador's wife, wasn't there, but it waperfectly understood between Trox and his wife. As long as you come to some agreement that way, that's fine. But it seems to me the basic point is that those functions are still going to have to be carried on whether the Department decides it's going to pay somebody, whether the spouse, the nuns down at the nearest convent who bring in hors d'oeuvres, or whoever...it's going to get to that point.*

Q (Fenzi): *You know who's doing it? This has come up in at least one of our interviews. At this point it's the spouses of the subordinate officers, who are ambitious and want to make brownie points with their husbands' superiors...the next level — wives of the Political and Economic Officers just below DCM — are the ones doing it because their husbands are career oriented. You didn't find that?*

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Q (Williamson): Not at all, not at all.

Q (Fenzi): One interviewee said that she'd been put upon in that fashion.

Q (Williamson): No, no. But again, that is a question of how it comes from the top.

Q (Fenzi): Or your relationship with your spouse, too. Q (Williamson): Yes, those are both factors in this situation. But I did not find that at all.

LAINGEN: So much now, today, depends on the CLO. Neither of us had that, of course. But I feel if that is well organized at post, then there shouldn't be any of these problems, really. Wives should be able to be free to do their own thing.

One of the interesting things arising from the 1985 Spouse Report was that a majority of people at post felt an ambassador's wife should take a leadership role in the community. That really opened my eyes! So they weren't just complaining in a vacuum, they felt these expectations all around them. Their morale was low, because they knew that the majority of people at post think they should behave a certain way despite the Directive. One interesting comment I recall seeing concerned an ambassador whose wife was an officer. She said that if he became an ambassador she would look for another post, because she would never serve as his wife, but he said an ambassador's wife should take a leadership role at post. So, a number of interesting comments came from this questionnaire. Now, five years later, I don't know how useful it's been. I've seen it quoted here and there. But when you get down to really the reality of the situation, no matter how much FLO does, no matter how many reports we write, the society moves, by itself, in a certain direction.

Q (Fenzi): And the Foreign Service is part of it. Yet why wasn't the FSA proposal attached to the Report as the recommendation?

LAINGEN: Well, I don't want to get into the reasons -

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Q (Fenzi): Unless they're just personal, then there's no point in getting into the reason.

LAINGEN: My theory of why it was is because she [Sue Low] wanted to write her proposal on her own. She didn't want to cooperate —

Q (Fenzi): Then if it's personal we shouldn't go into it —

LAINGEN: But I can see no other reason why she dropped out of it. Also, I was adamant that the spouse committee write it; that was the other thing. I didn't want to repeat what we'd gone through in the Crisis Report, where four of us sat around nitpicking about this comma and that comma — I thought I cannot do that again. Or if you'd have a suggestion, and they'd say “No! That's not the way it's going to be.” You know, you feel you're wasting your time. So I set it up where each person wrote her own section and then we got together and someone would say, “where did you get that statistic? Are you sure?” “Absolutely.” We backed it up that way. But we did not spend endless hours nitpicking the paper to death. Then, later, Carol Sutherland and I were put on the spot —

Q (Williamson): What was Carol doing at the time?

LAINGEN: She was head of the Forum. She had a job downtown so we could use the computer in her office. I just really was deeply grateful to her, because it showed the kind of cooperative, open spirit to make it possible for us to get this done. You see, we had the Cox Foundation grant and were indebted to them, obligated to come out with something. And we also had Mr. Hursh-Cesar's statistical report, which I have, where anyone questioning the statistics could access. We, of course, looked over his report and wrote ours from his. We also made a point in this 1985 report that because so many people had returned their questionnaires with comments that were so well said and pertinent that we decided to use those quotations —

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Q (Williamson): Oh, yes. And I remember being very pleasantly surprised at how many people had responded to the questionnaire, which was far in excess of the normal percentage of returns.

LAINGEN: Exactly. As I say, I don't know how much is pertinent today. Then on the Cox Foundation money, we also disseminated the Report and questionnaire to AID and USIS spouses, who were very interested in this and gave us a lot of input. CIA spouses weren't allowed to participate — which caused me to think I wouldn't be a CIA spouse for anything in the world (all three laugh) the way they're treated!

Q (Williamson): Well, there are compensations, I think.

LAINGEN: I'm sure there are.

Q (Williamson): (laughing) I know there are. Financially, certainly.

Q (Fenzi): (laughing) I had a question to come back to: The \$30,000 from the Cox Foundation. How was that divided up, how used?

LAINGEN: Mostly it went to, I threw out the papers later, I can't tell you the percentages, but a great deal went to Mr. Hursh-Cesar for his statistical analysis. Of course there was printing. The Department paid for dissemination of the questionnaire, but the Cox Foundation paid for mailing the report overseas.

Q (Fenzi): You didn't get a stipend for administering it?

LAINGEN: Oh, no. The Report came through AAFSW—a volunteer organization.

Q (Fenzi): A certain portion of the \$30,000 should have been written into the budget for administration. Today, one would just say "mpercentage to do this will be such-and-such."

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LAINGEN: No, that never occurred to us, never occurred to us. (laughing) How stupid we were. We didn't, even, ask for travel or expenses or anything.

Q (Fenzi): Well, maybe we've come that far in five years, but today my first response would be "well, is this going to be enough to pay the administrative costs of — "

LAINGEN: Well, I tell you, today I wouldn't do this again. The thing is, it was after the hostage crisis. The homecoming and aftermath was in many ways more difficult than during, if you can believe it — the adjustments, and what job is Bruce going to get, and I don't want to go overseas. It was really a very stressful, difficult time. When I hear now of people who have been depressed, I realize I went through a terrible depression. I would sit out at the end of Fort McNair and stare at the water. I didn't want to jump in, I wasn't at that point, but I was at such a crossroads of my own life — what I wanted to do. I did not want the Foreign Service any more, it had mistreated me, used me, maligned me, taken my husband overseas and put him in danger, hadn't supported me.

Q (Williamson): You'd had it.

LAINGEN: And then here was Bruce not knowing — he was talking of running for the Senate, I didn't want him to, I thought that was a terrible idea. It was just an awful time. So I sort of grabbed onto this project as something to do, really, just to get it off my chest. And find out if I was the only one, or were there others. It was kind of therapy for me. Today, since Bruce has retired, and I am able to do my own thing, I'm almost callous, now, but happy.

In the beginning when I went into this period of assessment about spouses in the Foreign Service, even in that first meeting with Macomber, we found that everybody was unhappy: the singles were unhappy ; the senior wives were overbearing; the junior wives were unhappy. So here it was, a lot later, 1988, I think. Bruce had just retired, and I got a call from Marguerite Cooper. I could have died laughing! She's just been given an award of

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some money for something that she did. So she's all excited and is organizing this group of Foreign Service families. "I want you to be on the Board," she said. "You know, it's just really fantastic what we have found. The singles are unhappy, the older wives are overbearing, the junior wives are unhappy — " (they all break up, hilarious) And I said, "THANK YOU, NO, MARGUERITE." (more laughter)

Q (Fenzi): "I've just run full circle."

LAINGEN: Isn't it incredible? That was in 1971, and here she's calling me in 1988. And I said, "You're on your own, kiddo. Because I have had it, from sticking my head out in 1978 and 1985." So that is the saga. And I've got all this printed stuff for your files.

Q (Fenzi): I first met you in the midst of all that turmoil, and not having known any of the history, I have to be very frank with you. There were times I would think, well, where are you coming from? Now that I know a great deal more about the history of all of this, I can see your frustration at that time.

Q (Williamson): At each juncture.

LAINGEN: There was talk that, first of all, they would psychoanalyze the hostages and their families and counsel them and help them and so forth. That was very sparse. Eventually for some reason the Department totally dropped all the analysis of the hostage crisis, the psychological — they were going to do some sort of study of the families and see how they'd turned out and follow us. You know, after the Vietnam War, for years the POWs were taking physicals and being observed. Once a year they automatically went to their medical facilities and were examined physically and psychologically.

So here we were, a group of real good guinea pigs, and they were going to do the same. I believe it was the change of administration, that Reagan wanted to sweep the hostage situation under the rug and totally forget it. I'll never forget, when we went to the Department where all the hostages were to receive the Medal of Valor, they were seated

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on the stage. General Haig entered and said, "Here, Bruce, you come over here, I'll give you your Medal, the rest of you can pick up your Medal in Room 1708." (gasps from F and W) It was that callous.

Q (Williamson): (exhaling strong breath) — it's outrageous.

LAINGEN: It was, it was absolutely outrageous, but that is what happened. I think if you were to interview people like Marian Precht, wife of FSO Henry Precht, who had been working on the Iran Task Force, you would see that this group had set up all the plans for the Homecoming. After Reagan won the election, however, the plans were totally upset by the new people who came in. They weren't going to do this, or that —

Q (Williamson): What were the changes?

LAINGEN: If Jimmy Carter had still been in the White House, I think there would have been tremendous celebrations in the White House — a big dinner party, or who knows, but it would have gone on and on, I'm sure. There would have been better career possibilities for the hostages. Reagan wanted to just get them in — we did have a big tea party at the White House.

Q (Williamson): Wasn't there a procession from Union Station or somewhere?

LAINGEN: Oh, yes, from Andrews Air Force Base. We flew in from West Point. That was absolutely fantastic. Bruce and I were on the bus with George and Barbara Bush, they were our escorts. And the bus window had that very dark glass that prevents those outside from seeing in. Bruce asked Mrs. Bush for some lipstick and wrote a big THANK YOU and put it up against the window. A few weeks later we got the sign in the mail from Barbara Bush, saying, "I thought you'd want this for your scrapbook."

Well, the homecoming was fine, but it was definitely changed by the new administration's desire to have it over with, let's be done with this. Anyway, I think that had to do with

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the State Department's later decision not to pursue us any further on lessons learned. I thought, even though there were many things the Department did right by us families, there was still a lot they should know they should not have done.

Q (Williamson): Well, one can always learn from any situation.

LAINGEN: Well, one would think so, but they were not interested in what we spouses or family members had to say. Until along comes Jean German, and I think this is a fantastic woman because she was the first one to say to me, "I want to hear what you have to say." At that time she was in AAFSW, and we wrote the Crisis Report, which would not have come about without Jean German. Because she and Fanchon Silberstein, who was head of the OBC at that time, those two saw that there was much to be learned. Eventually Jean became the deputy to Fanchon at OBC, and called in Wallapa Tomseth and Marge German and various wives to sit down and talk about the crisis, how it was handled for the families.

Q (Williamson): Excuse me, Penne, wasn't Ginny Taylor the first crisis counselor, or whatever we call it in FLO now — her first job in FLO, if I remember correctly, was head of Crises — what did we call it? It had a different title.

LAINGEN: She was, but you see the thing was, FLO became a part of State Department, under Management. Therefore Ginny was very much a part of that. She was with us all through the hostage crisis, but Marian Precht was head of this Iran Working Group (IWG). (FLO was told not to interfere in the IWG's work, so Ginny Taylor did not handle us directly. This was done by volunteer spouses. I don't know if you want me to go into that phase...

Q (Fenzi): I think that Joan and I having been CLOs, can appreciate Ginny's position. She had to work with Management.

LAINGEN: Oh, you do.

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Q (Fenzi): *She had to keep her channels open to the —*

Q (Williamson): *Of course. I was only trying to gain perspective on when Ginny was, as was my understanding, the first one in an established crisis position whatever they were calling it — trying to pin down the year in relation to our discussion.*

LAINGEN: What I'm saying is that she was long gone by the time the crisis was over. Therefore, she was not in OBC; that was Jean German and Fanchon Silberstein. To resume, the State Department did not want to hear what we had to say. It was only when Jean and Fanchon saw that they might learn from us, that they called us in saying, "Let's write a Crisis Report". That's how that came about.

Q (Fenzi): *Did they then turn that over to FLO?*

LAINGEN: Well yes, they gave it to the Department, and on that particularly their criticism of the Medical Division. Medical was very unhappy with the comments and for a long time sat on their papers. Eventually in the Crisis Report I think we kind of softened that part of it down because they were very upset by some of the recommendations. I have never known — you'll have to ask Sue Low or Sue Parsons — what happened to the Crisis Report recommendations. Whether FLO incorporated them and pushed them — probably so, because Sue Parsons was then in, but I never knew what became of that report.

Meanwhile, Jean German became head of OBC and was very much interested in new programs on the handling of families in crisis. She had me write a report, called "Living in a Stressful World." I'll give you a copy for your files, and also these letters which you can photocopy, which I think go along with it. They're saying, to give one example: "Congratulations on a fine and monumental piece of work. I want you to know that even though I was reading it as an editor, it held my interest throughout. I learned a lot. You are providing important information and support for your reader." That was signed "Sarah." And a letter from overseas, John Spitzer, in AID: "One of our employees stationed in

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Yemen recently told me that the FLO mailing on “Parenting in a Stressful World” had reached them just before the embassy communicator was shot last month. He went on to say how helpful it had been to the parents in Sanaa. Apparently, the children in Yemen exhibited many of the same behavior changes covered in the article. The parents, however, knew what symptoms to look for and how to react to these emerging patterns.”

Q (Williamson): Oh, terrific.

LAINGEN: There was another one, something from Marcia Curran. I think it's very interesting that that report was a success. Then I did a few other things for Marilyn Holmes, in her video, on the handling of families in crisis situations. I do believe that OBC has a better handle on it now than the State Department. I did hear through the years from various hostage families, who say, “Well, the Department calls us, but they're so callous,” they're so this, or that. We heard it with the PanAm 103 families and the Beirut hostage families, how the State Department would say, “We've got your child's body here. Come down and get it.” They were so callous.

Now, with this latest crisis in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, I saw the other day they've got, I believe, 40 people telephoning every day 3,000 family members. It's an incredible task. I said to Bruce, I wonder if I should volunteer and go down and talk to these folks. Because when you've had an experience, you are more valuable than people who have not.

Q (Fenzi): Sure. You're more in tune to their feelings.

LAINGEN: Then I thought, no, I won't do tha(half-apologetic laugh). Well, I would if they called me. But to just volunteer, I don't think they really want the spouses to come in any more. Betty Atherton did it, but... my feeling is they just would rather bumble along the way they do it.

Q (Fenzi): But you know we've come a long way. Here again, to fall back on one of our interviews, I don't remember when the crisis in Santo Domingo was, it must have been

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either late 1950s or early 60s, but the ambassador's wife left when there was "a crisis." It occurred to her later that maybe she should have done something about the staff, but her rationale was that you don't rock the Department's boat. So she came home and just left the families there. During her interview, she said, "You know, one thing I did do." She had seen Louisa Kennedy on television. "I invited her to tea because I wanted to know what went on in her mind that made that group realize something should be done to help these people." So we've come a long way in the last 25-30 years.

LAINGEN: Well, I'm not so sure we have come a long way.

Q (Fenzi): But her reaction, Penne, was that you didn't do anything about a crisis because you didn't want to confront State Department tradition. And that's not all that long ago.

LAINGEN: Oh, well, I see — you mean we've come a long way in rocking the boat.

Q (Fenzi): Yes.

LAINGEN: Could be. But you know yourself, the generation or two before ours, the Cabots and their ilk, didn't think of the State Department as at all a social organization to take care of everybody.

Q (Fenzi): Oh, no, of course not.

LAINGEN: In fact, (laughing) they hardly got paid, some of them.

Q (Fenzi): See, they didn't need the salary, they didn't need a support system, because they were quite accustomed to taking care of themselves financially. And traveling — they were sophisticated before they ever got to the State Department.

LAINGEN: But what worries me today is that instead of becoming more caring, we really are becoming less caring. We are becoming media conscious, so that we have all these videos that we show and this and that. But the personal hands-on contacts, I wonder.

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Q (Williamson): *But doesn't that reflect society in general?*

LAINGEN: It does, exactly, sure.

Q (Fenzi): *And that's because there are more people.*

Q (Williamson): *Not necessarily. I don't think it's ipso facto because there's more people, I think that just in general it seems to me it's partly a carry over from this whole period of either what's in it for me or I've got mine. I'm deliberately staying away from calling it the me generation as such. But this whole emphasis on I've got mine.*

LAINGEN: Speaking of that, when I got back from Malta I went to a career counseling course, not because I was going to start a career, but because I really wanted to know what was going on with women and listen to the attitudes in the Service. I've put that in the Georgetown Symposium essay. My reaction was that the State Department was financing this woman to come in and tell you how to get a career to get you away from the Foreign Service, and it seemed to me that it was kind of ludicrous that the Department would pay for teaching women how to break away, instead of bringing you back, finding ways to recall your sense of allegiance.

Anyway, this one exercise I will never forget. The teacher said, "Now," and she drew a big rectangle on the blackboard, "this is your conference table, this is your life, and I want you to put around this conference table your board of directors, who runs your meetings, who runs your life." So I immediately went right to work. "That's easy." I put my husband at one end and his career at the other. (laughter) And then I put my three sons on the side, and my parents and my activities were on the other side, as well as the pets and all the obligations I had to the church, and whatever.

The teacher came by my desk and whipped it off like I was perfectly made for her. She took my exercise to the blackboard. "Now you see how your life is totally run by everybody but you," she said. "My rectangle is here and at the end I have a tremendous circle and

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I am at the head of the table. And that's all there is." I remember being just devastated, going home, and realizing I was not in control of my life at all. I said, "that's my life, I'm lying right there on the middle of that table." (laughing) You can see the tremendous psychological upheaval that I have gone through just being called a sadomasochist and that I want to victimize junior wives.

Q (Williamson): Well, it all came at one time, Penne. It was a one-two punch. You'd come back from Malta, then with all this business with Bruce, with the hostage situation, it was all as if you were got in the ring and were going to ten rounds, and about the fifth round you realize(she laughs) "what on earth am I doing here and how do I get out of here?"

LAINGEN: And you can imagine, I mean, to look at the Directive that says "you're free to be your own person." I mean, they've got to be kidding, they've got to be!" Now, maybe neither of you had that experience, I don't know.

Q (Williamson): Which experience? (hearty laughs)

LAINGEN: I mean the psychological. Maybe some people do feel free to be the "me" at the head of the conference table, but I don't frankly think, Foreign Service or not, that any of us can go through life totally without some other things coming into it. I mean, if you have children, don't they figure somewhat?

Q (Williamson): I must say I have seen, for lack of a more convenient word, I've seen some totally selfish spouses in the last seven, eight, ten years in the Foreign Service. Totally. And they would conform to your feeling — no, the only thing was they did have a little regret on leaving post because it would mean that they wouldn't get to travel quite as much. But they hadn't been on post anyway because they were too busy doing their job back here with their separate allowance.

LAINGEN: Well, of course, I think we forget the men in this situation.

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Q (Williamson): *In what way?*

LAINGEN: Well, some women who want to be their own person are demanding that the men pitch in, let's say, with the housekeeping and child care. I'm not saying they shouldn't, but it tends to make men look like they've been totally self-centered, totally selfish, when really, men are not. Men have had all the responsibility, not only for their career but for their families — the financial care of the family, and many men take care of the garden, of the car, the furnace. I mean, I don't see why mopping the floor, let's say, (it's a job that nobody likes) but — how shall I say this? — I don't think men have been as selfish as women have made them out to be.

Q (Williamson): *Well, that's been this whole problem with this whole feminist movement and why the pendulum continues to swing back and forth. It seems to me there was an over reaction, there was a stridency and too strong a position taken in the beginning which has caused, in our society in general, people to draw back to a certain degree, or at least reexamine the positions that were taken in the forefront of this feminist movement or the "now" or whatever you want to call it.*

LAINGEN: And the pitiable part is a perception that women who want to take care of their children or stay home is a "stupid thing to do."

Q (Williamson): *It's perceived as worthless because no financial value is placed on it.*

LAINGEN: The power of the paycheck.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Spouse: Lowell Bruce Laingen
Spouse's Position: AEP, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State

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Spouse Entered Service: 1949 Left Service: 1987 You Entered Service: 1957 Left Service: Same

Status: Spouse of Retiree Posts: 1957-60 Washington, DC, Greek Desk Officer
1960-64 Karachi, Pakistan, Political Officer 1964-66 Washington, DC, Desk Officer
Pakistan/Afghanistan 1967-68 Washington, DC, National War College 1968-71 Kabul, Afghanistan, DCM 1971-74 Washington, DC, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East/South Asia 1974-76 Washington, DC, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs 1977-79 Valetta, Mafia, AEP 1979-81 Tehran, Iran, charg# d'affaires and hostage (Family in U.S.) 1981-86 Washington, DC, Vice President, National Defense University

Place/Date of birth: Ann Arbor, Michigan, December 1, 1931

Maiden Name: Penelope Lippitt Babcock

Parents:

Frederick Morrison Babcock, Founder, Federal Housing Administration

Margaret Shippen Babcock

Schools: 1949 Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School 1949-52 Randolph Macon 1953 George Washington University, BA

Profession: Research Analyst, FBI; FS wife par excellence; Freelance writer

Date/Place of Marriage: June 1, 1957, Chevy Chase, MD - All Saints Episcopal

Children:

William Bruce Laingen

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Lt. Charles Winslow Laingen

James Palmer Laingen

Honors: 1978Benefactress of Mafia 1982Mortar Board Leadership Award 1983Seabury
-Western Theological Seminary Distinguished Christian Service Medal 1987Nominated
Washington Woman of the Year

Positions held: At Post: Karachi, Pakistan * Taught sewing to orphans * Fund raiser for
orphanage * Editor of American Woman's Club Newsletter "The Camel Bell" * Author of
embassy musical * Member of Woman's Club Craft Show * Judge at Ghandi Gardens
Flower Show * Organizer of American Craft Show, USIA * Decoration Chairman of Fund
Raising Ball * Co-Chairman of Cathedral Bazaar

Kabul, Afghanistan * Manager of American Woman's Club Gift Shop, which trained
and guided over 100 Afghan craftsmen * Chairman of American * Woman's Club Stall
at annual International Fair * Organizer of USIA Art Exhibit at DCM's residence and
contributor * Candy Striper at Avicenna Hospital * Cub Scout mother * PTA member
* Writer of American Woman's Club * Skit to raise money for Afghan School in Istalif
* Participant in Gilbert and Sullivan "Trial By Jury" of British Council * Member of
Ambassador's Wife Country Team, Protocol Chairman * Organizer of children's program
for Afghan Jeshyn Parade for the Queen * Member of American Woman's Club * Speaker
at Graduation of Servant Hygiene School

Valetta, Malta: *Chairman of Newman Club programs * PTA member at De La Salle
Christian Brothers School * Chairman of Games Night to raise money for the National
Trust to restore an ancient church * Organizer of two concerts, art exhibit, and various
programs at the American embassy residence * Chairman of American Stall for
Handicapped Bazaar * Member of Ikebana International * Honorary President of American
Woman's Club * Teacher of typing to American children * Organizer of Square Dance

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Group of Americans and Maltese * Participant in American Art Show at DCM's residence
* Member of Maltese President's August Moon Ball Committee * Organizer of embassy
Town Meetings * Honorary member of Maltese-Gozitan Society * Honorary Member of
Maltese-American Society * Hostess of American Residence in Malta for a myriad of
representational functions

In Washington, DC: * Red Cross Driver * AAFSW member and officer * Participant in
AAFSW Cathedral Flower Mart Stall * Member of Board, PTA * Worker in church thrift
shop * Chairman of fund raising activities for Radnor School * Member of National War
College Woman's Club * Founder of Family Liaison Action Group (FLAG) for families
of American hostages in Iran * Editor of FLAG Bulletin * Founder of the Yellow Ribbon
Campaign * Member of No Greater Love Philanthropic Organization and National
Organization of Victim Assistance * 1982Alternate Recording Secretary AAFSW *
1983Recording Secretary AAFSW * 1982-83Contributor to AAFSW Forum Report on
Families in Crisis * 1983-85Chairman of Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service Forum
Committee, AAFSW * 1985Writer of Report, The Role of the Spouse in the Foreign
Service * 1981Contributor to Written Symposium, "Diplomacy: the Role of the Wife,"
Institute of Diplomatic Studies * 1986Chairman of AAFSW Think Tank Committee *
1984Reviser of AAFSW Archives * March 1987Participant in Conference "The Human
Side of Terrorism," * 1986Author of Report "Living in a Stressful World" for OBC *
Contributor to "Manuscripts" magazine and other articles * Contributor to annual church
bazaar * 1987-88Interviewer and transcriber for the Foreign Service Family Oral History
Project

End of interview